

[By Jay Heflin, The Hill](#)

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) is circulating a letter to lawmakers that urges BP CEO Tony Hayward to divert the company's proposed dividends into the escrow account being created to pay for damages caused by the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

"President Obama and 54 members of the U.S. Senate have called for the establishment of an independently administered \$20 billion escrow account, which would be available to cover cleanup costs and economic damages," the letter states, which is addressed to Hayward. "We join them in their request and further call on BP to divert dividend payments to this account until such time that all cleanup and compensation costs are fully covered."

BP board members are weighing whether to issue the quarterly dividend payment given the political pressure the company is under to tend to the Gulf area and not to its shareholders.

The oil giant has repeatedly stated that it will spare no expense in paying legitimate claims to those affected by the oil spill.

Welch contends that transferring the dividend payment into the escrow account would send a strong signal that the company is serious about repairing the Gulf region.

"Your company has affirmed its intention to pay the full costs of this devastating environmental and economic disaster," the letter states. "As those costs continue to rise to \$37 billion, by one estimate, the American people require an assurance that your company will be able to honor all legitimate claims."